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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
DEPARTMENT OF EXTENSION

SUGGESTIONS FOR DEBATERS



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# Suggestions for Debaters

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A successful speech must have one or more of three qualities: it must convey information, carry conviction or breathe inspiration. This implies worth-while material, well prepared and delivered with the reinforcement of a strong and pleasing personality. Time is frequently wasted in the attempt to discuss silly and futile questions. For example, the resolution "Resolved that a cleanly bad-tempered wife is preferable to a slovenly good-natured one" is certainly not worth wasting time upon when there are so many equally interesting and much more valuable questions to be discussed. As an aid in selecting profitable topics a list of resolutions has been included in this bulletin.

A pleasing platform presence can to a large extent be developed, and below are given a few suggestions which the beginner would do well to follow.

(a) Be sure to make yourself heard. Stand well to the front of the platform, hold the head up, and speak rather slowly, being careful to pronounce each word clearly and distinctly. If in doubt, select some person at the back of the room and see if he follows you. If those at the back can hear there is no cause for worry on this point.

(b) Cultivate the ability to stand still and look your audience in the eye. Use few, if any, conscious gestures. An appearance of poise and self-control goes a long way in making a favorable impression.

(c) Prepare your material carefully. Arrange your thoughts to follow clearly and naturally upon each other.

(d) Use the simplest words you can find to express your ideas. Avoid long and involved sentences. Go directly to the point. Never leave the audience wondering what you are driving at.

(e) In debate be courteous and considerate of your opponent's feelings. Sarcasm is the weakest form of wit and often recoils upon the one who uses it.

(f) If you win, accept victory modestly; if you lose, congratulate your opponent.

For the use of organizations planning a series of debates between towns or rural communities, we are including in this pamphlet the by-laws used by the Provincial High School Debating League of Alberta, as follows:

# By-Laws

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1. Debates shall be held on dates specified in the schedule for the current term, copies of which will be sent to each school competing.
2. A school failing to debate on any regularly appointed date shall forfeit to its opponent by default.
3. All debates except the finals for each year shall be double-headers, that is each competing school shall send a team to debate with its opponent on the same date it is entertaining a team from the opposing school.
4. The choice of subject or subjects for debate shall be made by the Department of Extension of the University of Alberta.
5. In the first round of the preliminaries, the visiting team shall in each case take the affirmative, but in the succeeding debates up to and including the semi-finals, the visiting team shall in each case take alternately the negative and affirmative. In the case of the final debate which shall be held at the University in Edmonton, a draw shall be made for choice of sides by representatives of the schools competing.
6. Each team shall consist of two debaters.
7. Only bona-fide students of the schools they represent for the current term of academic standing not higher than Grade XII shall be eligible to debate in this League.
8. Any debater who has taken part in more than one debate in the High School Debating League will not be eligible for competition in either division in any following year.
9. Twelve minutes shall be allotted each speaker, and five minutes to the leader of the affirmative for rebuttal.
10. A time keeper, mutually satisfactory to the two teams, shall be appointed by the Chairman. Beginning three minutes before expiration of time, a card shall be displayed each minute giving the time remaining to the speaker. At the conclusion of time, a bell shall be rung and the speaker allowed to complete his sentence before concluding his speech.
11. Judges shall be arranged for by the Department of Extension, and as far as possible will be secured from the University staff, the Normal schools, and the Department of Education. Where judges

are so secured, one judge will officiate at each debate in the joint capacity of judge and critic, and his decision shall be in every case final, so far as the debate itself is concerned. In the event of accident such as failure of trains to arrive on schedule, so that the appointed judge cannot keep his engagement, the principal of the home school shall make such arrangements for judges as he is able to do with the mutual consent of the opposing visiting team.

12. The judges shall award their decision on the basis of sixty per cent. for argument, twenty per cent. for deportment and delivery, and twenty per cent. for literary style.
13. The decision of the judges shall in each case be final. No protests will be entertained except where non-eligible debaters have taken part. Any school using a debater not eligible to take part under By-law No. 7 or 8 shall forfeit the debate and be debarred from further participation in the series for the year.
14. The judges shall in each case make a report in duplicate to the Department of Extension on forms, which shall be provided for the purpose, within three days after the date of the debate.
15. Each school shall, except in the case of final debates, pay the expenses of its own team. In the case of the final debates the expenses of the contestants shall be paid by the Department of Extension.
16. A trophy, known as the Rutherford Cup for High School Debating, shall be held by the winning team in the final debate in "A" Division each year until the date of the final debate for the succeeding year, when it must be returned to the University. Any school winning the trophy for three years in succession shall become its permanent owner. A second trophy, known as the U.F.A. Cup, shall be held by the winners of "B" Division under the same conditions.

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## Notes for Contestants and Judges

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In a set debate a definite subject is selected for discussion and a definite resolution on that subject is proposed. Debaters may use any argument they think valid, but must respect any limitation of the subject directly expressed in the wording of the resolution.

### **Presentation of the Case by the Affirmative Side.**

The task of the affirmative side is to present the case and establish the position of the resolution against the attack of the negative side. This usually calls for a good defence on all the points on which the resolution is open to attack, and a good debater on the affirmative side will seek to make such a presentation of his case that he can meet his opponents on all issues on which they can come to a fight.

### **Presentation of the Case by the Negative Side.**

The task of the negative side is to break down the case of the affirmative side, and the method of attack will vary with the nature of the case. It may sometimes be sufficient to show some fatal defect in the case as presented, but in general the negative will not succeed without joining issue on all points that offer fair ground for a fight, and it will be necessary to strive for the massed effect of many arguments against the proposed resolution. The negative side may use various lines of attack, some of which are named here.

1. **Pure Refutation.** The negative side may be able to point some fatal defect, so that the whole case of the affirmative debaters falls to the ground, but this will very seldom happen. As a rule, the case presented will be too strong, and will contain so much that is good or at least plausible, that the negative will have little opportunity for direct refutation, and will have to build up an attack along the lines that offer the best chance of defeating the resolution.
2. **Plea of Insufficient Proof.** The negative may base its main attack on the plea that the affirmative have failed to make good their case, and if it can be shown that the arguments adduced are not sufficient to justify the resolution this will carry great weight. The fight then wages round the question of whether the case presented justified the resolution. In other words, the negative may admit that there is good in the arguments of their opponents, but fight them on the point whether they are sufficient to justify what is proposed in the resolution.
3. **Presentation by the Negative Side of a Counter Proposition.** Much discussion has taken place as to the validity of this procedure in a debate, and this note is intended to make clear the place that a counter proposition may have in a set debate.
  - (a) The negative will only be in a position to bring forward a counter proposition when they agree that the general situation under debate requires some resolution, and when, further, they have some resolution that they think they can prove to be preferable to that proposed by the affirmative.
  - (b) Any counter proposition must be stated with such clearness that it virtually becomes an alternative resolution, and though it may not be put in the form of a resolution, it should be equally definite so that it comes to issue with the resolution offered by the affirmative side.
  - (c) The bringing forward of a counter-proposition puts the negative side in the position of carrying the burden of proof, and if they fail to establish their proposition, they run the risk of disaster.

- (d) Any counter proposition should be **counter**; that is, it must clash with the resolution proposed by the affirmative. It is not enough to offer some variation of the treatment of the situation, which the affirmative might adopt without yielding up their own resolution. **THE COUNTER PROPOSITION MUST RULE OUT THE AFFIRMATIVE RESOLUTION, AND MUST NOT BE MERELY A MODIFICATION OF IT.**

#### **Mode of Address.**

A set debate is modelled on parliamentary procedure, but it is customary to introduce each speech by some such phrase as "Mr. Chairman, Honourable Judges, Worthy Opponents, Ladies and Gentlemen." After this courteous acknowledgement of those present, speakers should address the chairman only, using the terms "Mr. Chairman," or "Sir," and the audience should be treated as if it were a deliberative assembly. At the conclusion of a speech the speaker often acknowledges the audience in some such phrase as "I thank you," but this is felt to be an unnecessary departure from the parliamentary tone of a debate, and it is sufficient courtesy merely to bow before taking one's seat.

#### **Memorized Speeches in a Set Debate.**

A debater is of course entitled to use as he thinks best the time at his disposal, so long as he keeps within the rules under which debates are conducted. It must, however, always be kept in mind that there is a vital difference between a debate and a speaking contest. The essence of a debate is that the different sides come to a clash on the matter before them, and it is almost impossible to do this if the speeches are memorized.

The debaters must strive to come to grips with the case presented by their opponents, and where the affirmative has taken up a certain stand, it is not good debating for the negative merely to present a previously prepared case on the opposite side. Such a case may happen to clash well with the argument of the other side, but even in such a case it can generally be easily seen that the negative is only building up a parallel case, without direct clash with the affirmative case which has actually been presented.

In the case of young debaters, greater reliance will naturally be placed on preparation than would be the case with more experienced speakers, but it should be understood that no speech in a debate is a good debating speech unless it clashes with the case actually presented by the opponents.

What is being judged is not the subject, but the comparative debating ability of the opposing teams.

It should be remembered that the task of a judge in a set debate is not in any way concerned with the merits of the question being debated, but that what he is judging is the relative debating ability of the opposing teams as shown by their performance, and naturally the team that comes to grips with its opponents will, other things being equal, have the advantage.

Warning should be given by ringing a bell, or by some other device, some minutes before the close of each speech and again at the end of time.

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**LIST OF SUGGESTED RESOLUTIONS FOR DEBATE, ON WHICH  
MATERIAL IS IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE FROM  
THE DEPARTMENT OF EXTENSION**

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1. Resolved that Canada should own and operate her own navy.
2. Resolved that a gradual reduction of Canadian Tariff would be in the best interest of the Canadian people.
3. Resolved that Capital Punishment should be abolished.
4. Resolved that employers are justified in demanding an open shop.
5. Resolved that co-education is desirable.
6. Resolved that a commission form of city government is best.
7. Resolved that Canada should adopt compulsory military service.
8. Resolved that compulsory military training in Canada is desirable.
9. Resolved that compulsory social insurance would be in the best interest of society.
10. Resolved that the Consolidated School system is a success.
11. Resolved that the Western Provinces should own and control their own natural resources.
12. Resolved that co-operative banking would solve the western farmers' financial problems.
13. Resolved that Co-operative Trading Societies are desirable and profitable.
14. Resolved that Direct Legislation is in the interest of good government.
15. Resolved that the vote should be limited to those who are able to read and write.
16. Resolved that the system of education outlined in the Gary School Plan should be adopted in Alberta.
17. Resolved that Canada should own and control her railway systems.



18. Resolved that heredity has a greater influence in the formation of character than environment.
19. Resolved that the time is now ripe for Imperial Federation.
20. Resolved that in the activities of the "League of Nations" lies the world's hope of peace.
21. Resolved that the right to bequeath or to inherit be limited to a reasonable provision for dependents.
22. Resolved that all immigrants entering Canada should be subjected to a literacy test.
23. Resolved that military training in the schools or colleges of Canada is desirable.
24. Resolved that a minimum wage for men and women should be established by law.
25. Resolved that the Monroe Doctrine has been a benefit to the United States.
26. Resolved that the Mothers' Pensions Act as now administered in Alberta is good legislation.
27. Resolved that it would be in the interest of education to make more extensive use of motion pictures in school work.
28. Resolved that the Government of Alberta should establish and maintain a system of free municipal hospitals throughout the Province.
29. Resolved that every municipality should own and control its public utilities.
30. Resolved that the B.N.A. Act should be amended in such a way as to provide for a national school system in Canada.
31. Resolved that the Parliamentary form of Government is better than the Presidential form of Government.
32. Resolved that permanent peace is a greater menace to the welfare of a nation than war.
33. Resolved that the platform is more powerful than the press.
34. Resolved that prohibition in Canada has been a success.
35. Resolved that Proportional Representation should be established.
36. Resolved that Protection is of more benefit to a country than Free Trade.
37. Resolved that the office of Public Defender should be created throughout Canada.
38. Resolved that Canada should establish commercial reciprocity with the United States.
39. Resolved that rural life offers greater advantages than city life.
40. Resolved that the present school curriculum used in Alberta is satisfactory.
41. Resolved that a system of simplified spelling should be adopted in Canadian schools.
42. Resolved that a Single Tax system would be preferable to the present system in Canada.

43. Resolved that Socialism offers the best solution of the difficulties at present existing between Capital and Labor.
44. Resolved that the tractor is of more value to the farmer than the horse.
45. Resolved that Trade Unions on the whole are beneficial.
46. Resolved that Equal Suffrage is a success.
47. Resolved that Chinese and Japanese immigrants should be excluded from Canada.
48. Resolved that labor strikes are a benefit to the working man.
49. Resolved that newspapers are a menace to Society.
50. Resolved that novel reading is detrimental.
51. Resolved that motion pictures are doing more harm than good.
52. Vocational vs. Liberal Education.
53. Resolved that the departmental store has proved a benefit to the rural community (Mail Order business).
54. Resolved that smoking should be prohibited in Canada.
55. Resolved that there should be established co-operative laundries and kitchens in all thickly settled districts.
56. Resolved that the Dominion Government should at this time vigorously prosecute a campaign to attract agricultural immigration to Canada.
57. Resolved that local banks are of greater benefit to the farmer than branch banks.
58. Resolved that the Province of Alberta should apply for a charter, under the Canadian Bank Act, for incorporation of a provincial bank.
59. Resolved that the Dominion government should undertake the establishment of a National land bank, on the model of the U. S. Federal Farm Loan Board.
60. Resolved that it is expedient that the Canadian Government should forthwith undertake the completion of the Hudson Bay Railway.
61. Resolved that it is in the national interests that the Canadian Government should impose an export duty on pulpwood.
62. Resolved that the Alberta Wheat Pool has justified the faith of its supporters.
63. Resolved that the Government of Canada should at once take steps to co-operate with the United States in the joint construction of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence ship channel.
64. Resolved that automobiles are a benefit to society.
65. Resolved that radio will take the place of the newspaper in the future.
66. Resolved that school examinations should be abolished.
67. Resolved that the Sales Tax should be abolished.
68. Coal vs. Gas.

Material on the above subjects may be borrowed from the Department of Extension for a period of three weeks. The cost is payment of postage both ways, and the making good of any loss or damage.

A pamphlet entitled "Suggestions for Conduct of Mock Parliament" may be secured on application.

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Any further information will be furnished upon application to:

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